

**CAUSES, SYMPTOMS, AND TREATMENT OF DEPRESSION  
IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS  
A Creative Project**

Introduction

It has been predicted that depression affects 121 million people throughout the world (World Health Organization, 1). In fact, it has been estimated that by the year 2020, depression will be the second largest killer after heart disease (Murray & Fortinberry, 2005, 1). This mental disorder includes symptoms like sadness, hopelessness, social withdrawal, change in appetite and sleep, and low energy (Depression in Children- causes, etc.). Also, depression in children is becoming more prevalent as well. Currently, one in eight adolescents suffer from depression, and it is the sixth leading cause of death among kids from five to fourteen years old. (Statistics on Adolescent). This mental illness can become extremely serious if not treated. However, it is tricky to diagnose, especially in children, because its symptoms may be passed off as typical developmental behavior.

Since many children suffer depression without ever being diagnosed, I wanted to provide information for parents to help them figure out if their child suffers from this psychological disease; and also what to do once their child has been diagnosed with it. In order to do this, I am going to design an internet site that provides details about depression symptoms, causes, and treatments. There will be typed up information as well as links if parents wish to do further reading on the subject. In addition, there will be emphasis on the treatment because this is a debatable topic. Some people believe that depression can be treated with drugs, while others think that therapy is the best way to go. I will provide studies from both the medical and therapeutic techniques used to treat depression. One last thing that will be included is some information regarding the layout of the site and how I decided to use certain colors and fonts. Hopefully this internet site will help parents understand if their child has depression and what steps to take once diagnosed.

## **Children & the Internet**

### Introduction

Is it a rash or is it the chicken pox? I don't know; Google it (Apatow, 2007). The world of today has revolved around the Internet and its uses. It has grown up simultaneously with all of us. But how has our digital growth portrayed our social growth? All of the young children in the present are living during a period in which technology is surrounding us on a daily basis and the Internet is a commonplace for any and all transfers of information. They are growing up digital and seem to be in tune with computers and other digital products. An example can be seen in the new Windows 7 commercial, in which a child of maybe 5 or 6 years of age creates a slide show without much difficulty. It's mesmerizing to see something that used to be so complicated now becoming child's play.

What seems now to happen, in many families with children, is an increasing interest and sometimes pressures to get an online connection to younger and younger children. If we use the age, when 50% of an age group have started to in some way use the Internet, as a measure, that age was 10 years 2002. Three years later, 2005, the critical age had decreased to 8 years. After another three years, 2008, the critical age when half of the age group have started to use the Internet, is 5 years. 2009, the critical age is now close to 4 years (Findahl, 2009). As our involvement with the web proceeds further on, it is not too difficult to imagine our own children uttering "Google" as their very first word.

We live in an age that has gradually been made simpler through the use of the Internet. According to Nielsen Online, in May 2009, approximately 16 million U.S. children ages 2 to 11 years old were active online, totaling 9.5 percent of the overall online audience (Rick, 2009, July 8). This may be due to the rapid rise of computers in households of high-, middle-, and low-income.

Upgrades in our social networking have made a deep impact on the way we have viewed our digital world. All of the Facebooks, MySpaces, and Twitters have revolutionized how we communicate with friends, family, and just about anyone with an account. But I would like to see how these changes have impacted upon the youth who have grown up digital. My research will be directed towards finding out how the internet has helped to shape our youth and their social culture. It is relevant to understand how the Internet plays a large role in children's growth today. By learning what the Internet does for our youth, we can learn to utilize it to our advantage.

## **Animal Assisted Therapy & Autism**

### Introduction

Autism is a developmental disorder that is usually diagnosed within the first three years of a child's life. The main symptoms that are associated with autism include lack of social interactions, of verbal communication, and of interest of activities or play. "Children with autism tend to have communication problems with others; some are even non verbal, and are impaired in their social interaction such as eye contact, verbal communication, and touch" (American Psychiatric Association, 1995, as cited in Nakanishi, 1999). According to Autism Speaks, one in one hundred and fifty children are diagnosed with autism. This disorder is becoming increasingly common and the rate of autism is estimated to increase ten to seventeen percent annually. (Autism Speaks). Autism not only affects the person who has the disorder, but also impacts the family members and close acquaintances of the child. Although there is no treatment or cure for autism, there are different kinds of therapies to help lessen the symptoms and to help the child engage in the "normal" everyday activities that children their age are capable of doing. One effective type of therapy involves the use of animals as therapeutic assistance to help autistic children.

Owning a pet has many health benefits for those who are not diagnosed with autism, as well as those who are diagnosed with autism. One of the most important benefits of having a pet is always having a companion around. "Studies investigating the easily measurable physical effects of human-animal interaction have determined that pets are effective in reducing blood pressure and promoting survival in coronary artery illness" (Katcher, 1981, as cited in Heimlich, 2001). Pets are ideal for therapy because they offer unconditional love and do not refuse and threaten the clients. (Austin 1997, as cited in Nakanishi 1999). Interactions with animals have been proven to increase social interactions with autistic children. In many studies, the autistic children learn to comply and follow direction. The animals act as an incentive

or motivation for the children, and therefore allow the children to be more confident in themselves to function the same as a child without autism.

I chose to write about autism and animal assisted therapy because I became interested in the subject of autism in general after reading the book *The Ride Together* by Paul Karasik and Judy Karasik. The book was a memoir written by a brother and sister about their oldest brother David who suffered from autism. Before reading the book, I had never had that in depth of a view about autism. Reading their first hand stories about their brother really intrigued me to research the topic further. After doing research about autism in general, I then wanted to know the different ways of dealing with and treating autism. Although there is no cure or treatment, I learned about the benefits of animal assisted therapy. This topic is also important to society as a whole because autism is a growing disorder and already affects many people worldwide. This led me to my inquiry question: What are the effects of animal assisted therapy for children with autism?

## **Juvenile Justice Reform**

### Introduction

As countless people throughout history have put it, children are our future. As adults, we spend our lives raising the next generation with the hope that they will accomplish something greater than we ever did. However, every now and again, society gets a bad seed. Some people would call this child a delinquent, a lost cause. Those who work in the social services and corrections department, however, feel that these children simply need some redirecting. But what juvenile detention programs are most effective? Which programs will keep children from reoffending and ultimately redirect their lives?

According to the Urban Institute, California has more juveniles in the correctional system than any other state in the country. (Zachary Norris 2009) On an average day, according to data from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, nearly 20,000 youths are held in the state's secure facilities. These secure facilities consist of living and recreation areas in which the children spend their days completing rehabilitation exercises.

“Nationally, African American youth are confined in facilities at a rate over three times that of white youth and the Hispanic incarceration rate is 60 percent greater than the rate for whites.” (Michael Jones) In March 2000, California voters approved Proposition 21, a ballot initiative that increased the severity of penalties for juvenile offenders and had the effect of increasing the demand for juvenile confinement space. By 2005, the Division of Juvenile Justice made a commitment to go beyond correcting the problems identified by court-appointed experts. It initiated a critical transformation in how the needs of youth are identified and how treatment programs to meet those needs are delivered. As a result, youths are formally assessed using state of the art evaluation tools when they arrive at the Juvenile Detention Center. The DJJ is a State run and funded organization that over the years has failed miserably in cutting recidivism

rates while burning through funds capping \$430 million dollars. (Zachary Norris 2009)

Not all juvenile crimes will land a child in a detention center however. "Status Offenders" are those who are truant from school, running away, breaking curfew, being out of control of parents or guardians or incorrigible (in danger of becoming delinquent). Children who are under these offenses are not to be locked up in any kind of facility. These children are not simply sent home however, they are entered into programs mandated by the Office of Juvenile Justice Programs and Delinquency Prevention. Other Children are booked for more serious crimes such as property, drug, and violence offenses; these children are the focus of the tougher and more concrete programs aimed at the eradication of unwanted behavior. Juveniles accounted for 26 percent of all property arrests and 14 percent of violent crime arrests in 2008. (League of Women Voters of California)

## The Effects of Pesticides on Children

### Introduction:

The purpose of this study is to discover the effects of pesticides on children. There are two main ways that children are exposed to pesticides: through their environment and through ingestion. Environmental exposure varies from living in an area that has a high frequency of pesticide use to simply being exposed from the insecticides that we use in our garden or backyard. This study will focus on the effects of pesticides, through ingestion and discuss how pesticides affect children's growth and development. It seems like an easy task to avoid pesticides, just don't buy them, right? Wrong.

An examination of our common supermarket produce reveals that 98% of the oranges contained one pesticide residue and 82 percent contained more than one pesticide residue. 66 % of pears contained one pesticide residue and 31% contained more than one pesticide residue. 49% of apples contained one pesticide residue and 22% contained more than one pesticide residue (The pesticides in our food, 2004). I picked these three fruits because of their popularity, as well as their frequent use in toddler diets. Pesticides are in our supermarkets.

For this purpose, I am going to break pesticides down into two groups: hormone disruptors and neurological agents (nerve agents). Hormone disruptors, also known as endocrine disruptors, block or disrupt our normal hormone function. Hormones are needed for our bodies to grow and develop, as well as maintain every day functions critical for our well being. They can affect people by reducing fertility in men and women, loss of fetus during pregnancy, can induce early puberty, impair immunity, cause brain damage, induce behavioral problems and activate cancer. Neurological agents attack the nervous system by interrupting or damaging neurotransmitters. The brain sends signals throughout the body. It controls muscles, digestion, respiration and other body functions. Severity of symptoms can be as subtle as numb lips, what

you experience when you spray Off (mosquito repellent) on your lips, to paralysis and death. Nerve agents are long lasting and additive in nature. Additive in this case means that the more you consume the more severe the affects and damage caused to the body. All pesticides can be placed in one of these groups because of the way they affect living organisms.

People ingest pesticides daily through eating fruits and vegetables purchased at our supermarkets. Children run a larger risk of the effects of pesticides because pound for pound they ingest a larger quantity of pesticide residues. Isn't it ironic that we tell our children to eat their fruits and vegetables to be healthy, when in fact, we could be exposing them to more pesticide residue? What are these effects on children and their development? I chose this study because I want to know about the possible effects pesticide residue has on their growth, development and overall health. This investigation will give me answers, and I can develop a strategy to lower my children's health risk.